MASTER SUITES
LUXURY HOTELS ARE
BECOMING FINE ART
SPACES TO RIVAL
MANY GALLERIES

BY DALYA ALBERGE

Sir Antony Gormley's "Room", right, in display
at 55 Park Lane

He is a former winner of the Turner Prize and
represented in collections worldwide, but if you tell
Sir Antony Gormley his art sends you to sleep, he
won't be offended. That is assuming you are referring
to the "inhabitable sculpture" that he created for a
hotel bedroom, rather than one of his other artworks.
Gormley, best known for his "Angel of the North"
sculpture in Gateshead, received the commission
from the new Beaumont Hotel in Mayfair, London.
He came up with an oak-lined bedroom — titled
"Room" — which fills the void of his monumental
crouching figure on the building's exterior. Since
it opened last year, "Room" has had no shortage of
guests prepared to pay £2,500 for a night there.

It is a bold statement piece and one that reflects a
trend among top hotels worldwide to fill their spaces
with original art. They are acquiring paintings and
sculptures that would not disgrace a public gallery and
which, even if you can't afford to stay there, you can see
free of charge or for the price of a coffee in the bar.

Alex Toledo, a Paris-based art consultant whose
clients include Ritz-Carlton hotels, says: "Hotels,
especially hotel owners, recognise that they have been
spending a decent amount on art for many years without
it doing anything special for their property. They've
realised that the money could be used not only to tell an
interesting narrative about their properties but also to
make them more memorable."

He adds that hotels used to purchase decorative art
from "manufacturing companies" that churned out
works in bulk. "Now you're starting to see the desire of
hotels to ask more of the artwork to make their property
unique, rather than resembling many others," he adds.

There is also a move away from abstract art, previously
considered the "least offensive" form, he says. "Now,
hotels are willing to take more of a risk. That is what
is making art in hotels exciting right now. Our clients
are asking for a diversity of art that we wouldn't have
expected a couple of years ago."

He has been purchasing contemporary art for the
Ritz-Carlton's second hotel in Kazakhstan, due to open
in 2017 in the capital, Astana. He also acquired an
historical collection for The Lanesborough in London.
"Every single room is different from the next," he says.
"We sourced all the art, bought it, framed it and restored
a lot of it. The focus was on art from the 1830s and
earlier. "We imagined a wealthy English family living in
London at the time The Lanesborough was built."

Along with English portraits and military and hunting
scenes, the hotel has two paintings by Sir Joshua
Reynolds, the 18th-century master. His portraits of a
Captain John Smith and his unnamed wife greet visitors.

Some hotels want to establish a sense of place
through their art, though not necessarily through local
artists. In Norway, a luxury establishment in Oslo called
The Thief has three original collages inspired by
national and cultural symbols and created by British
Pop artist Sir Peter Blake, best known for his iconic
sleeve design for The Beatles' Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts
Club Band. The collages, which include depictions of
the quay in Bergen and folk dancing, decorate the
hotel’s penthouse suite.
It's a fact the work is not in a gallery. You look at something in an informal way. It's meaningful because it's in the 'real world'. You can look at it — or not.

He is among high-profile artists who work closely with Gillian Dole, managing director of CCA Galleries, which supplies high-quality prints to international hotels. They include 45 Park Lane, where the art programme extends to offering guests a personal exhibition tour by artists and even painting lessons with them.

She says that when hotels are refurbished, art is sometimes seen as a last-minute add-on, "missing the point that the art and artefacts — the things that go in a hotel — usually what make the hotel what it is.

"A lot of art in hotels is not really good art," notes Toledano. "It's not on traditional Galleries. It's not hard to make good art, but it has to be thought through and planned. Substituting hotel fittings for an art consultant is a much cheaper alternative.

Art consultant Toledano advises his clients to use special hangings to prevent works being removed. "You have to be able to move the works around the hotel," she adds. "Art is a lot like design. It should be able to work with the space."

"There is a lot of art in hotels," says Erin Hoover, vice-president of global brand design at Starwood Hotels, which owns the Westin, Sheraton and Le Méridien names. "Art is becoming more and more important for hotels, just as it is for other kinds of building or public spaces," she says. "A great example is the soon-to-be opened Westin Denver International Airport. The city of Denver requires all public buildings to contribute 1 per cent of their construction dollars on large projects to artwork. As a result, the hotel features $5m-worth of artwork and installations."

While many a public museum would be envious of such a budget, security is a concern for hotel groups. The art consultant Toledano advises his clients to use special hangings to prevent works being removed. "You have to have special tools. If you tried to take them off, you'd probably rip the wall off," he says.

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